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President: Mr. Gurirab . . . . . (Namibia)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Ingólfsson (Iceland), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 35

Assistance in mine action

Report of the Secretary-General (A/54/445)

The Acting President: I should like to inform members that, in two letters, dated 5 and 6 October 1999 respectively, addressed to the President of the General Assembly, the Permanent Representative of Italy to the United Nations, in his capacity as Chairman of the Group of Western European and other States for the month of October, requests that the General Assembly hear statements by the observers of the Holy See and of Switzerland in the debate on agenda item 35.

Taking into account the importance attached to the issue under discussion, it is proposed that the General Assembly take a decision on that request.

May I take it that there is no objection to the proposal to hear the observer of the Holy See?

It was so decided.

The Acting President: May I take it that there is no objection to the proposal to hear the observer of Switzerland?

It was so decided.

Mr. Kahiluoto (Finland): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union — Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia — and the associated countries Cyprus and Malta, as well as the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) country member of the European Economic Area (EEA), Iceland, align themselves with this statement.

This agenda item — "Assistance in mine action" — brings a field of tremendous humanitarian suffering before us. Almost one third of the world's nations are, to some extent, contaminated by millions of anti-personnel landmines and unexploded ordnance. Every 20 minutes, someone — in most cases a civilian — is either killed or maimed by an anti-personnel landmine.

Anti-personnel landmines have serious social and economic consequences for the populations of mine-affected countries. Many of the countries which are most severely affected are the least developed. The presence or perceived presence of a few anti-personnel mines has the power to disrupt entire communities.

Significant human and financial resources have been devoted by the international community to assistance in mine action. Many encouraging developments to counter the mine problem have taken place during the last few years. A holistic and multidimensional approach has been

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developed. The responsibilities of United Nations agencies involved in mine action have been determined. The global landmine problem, in terms of the number of mines laid, has been more accurately surveyed. The number of mine incidents has been reduced in many countries and the use of technology and mine-detection dogs to accelerate mine clearance programmes has become a common practice. Much has been done, but more efficient action will be needed.

The primary responsibility for mine action lies with the parties responsible for laying the mines. The extent to which the international community should be called upon to provide assistance in mine action is dependent upon the capacity of the local parties involved to assume these obligations themselves. In this regard, the commitment to renounce the use of anti-personnel landmines is of particular importance.

There have been several important developments in the field of mine action in 1999. The European Union welcomed the entry into force on 1 March 1999 of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction and was pleased to participate in the First Meeting of States Parties to the Convention in May 1999 in Maputo. We also welcome the entry into force on 3 December 1998 of the amended Protocol II to the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects.

In 1997, the European Union adopted a Joint Action regarding anti-personnel landmines, in which the Union reiterates its commitment to the goal of the total elimination of anti-personnel landmines worldwide; to establishing a common moratorium on the production and transfer of anti-personnel landmines; and to undertaking to seek to promote in all appropriate forums, including the Conference on Disarmament, all efforts likely to contribute to the Joint Action objectives. The Union welcomed, for this reason, the opening for signature in Ottawa of the Convention and the efforts made by its signatories to promote universal accession to the Convention.

The European Union supports the central coordinating role of the United Nations Mine Action Service in the field of humanitarian mine action within the United Nations and beyond. We welcome the prompt establishment of the Mine Action Coordination Centre in Kosovo, under the auspices of the Mine Action Service, and encourage similar approaches, where appropriate, to other emergency situations.

The European Union strongly supports the Ottawa Convention inter-sessional work. The five standing committees of experts, which will give their recommendations to the Second Meeting of States Parties, have an important role to play when bringing mine action to the next millennium.

We are committed to participating in international efforts to eliminate these weapons. The Union is the major donor in mine clearance, victim assistance and other mine-action-related activities. In 1993-1997 the Union contributed approximately 135 million euros to mine clearance and victim assistance. In 1998, total funding by the European Commission and member States in mine-action-related activities amounted to approximately 103 million euros. While taking due account of humanitarian concerns, the Union will focus its financial and technical assistance on States parties and on signatories which fully observe in practice the principles and objectives of the Ottawa Convention. The member States also further mine action efforts within the framework of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, which has approved a new global humanitarian mine action chapter for its partnership work programme and is developing concrete, practical cooperation in this field. We confirm our commitment to work actively to promote efforts of the international community towards the complete elimination of anti-personnel landmines.

Strong commitment from the international community in the field of mine action is still needed. In order to maintain the momentum and the credibility of mine action, we have to be able to further improve mine action efforts and to put an end to the enormous humanitarian tragedy caused by anti-personnel landmines. We have committed ourselves to solving the problem within years, not decades. With this in mind, the European Union is again this year sponsoring a draft resolution on assistance in mine action, which we hope will receive broad support and will be adopted by consensus.

Mr. Šimonović (Croatia): The Republic of Croatia has direct experience of the disastrous effects of mines and therefore attaches special importance to mine action assistance. My country was one of the first to actively support the idea of a total ban of anti-personnel landmines; we welcomed this initiative and all subsequent

coordinated actions taken by like-minded States and international and non-governmental organizations.

The Republic of Croatia signed the Convention on the Prohibition of Anti-personnel Mines in Ottawa on 4 December 1997. The Government adopted the Convention in March 1998 and Parliament ratified it in April. The ratification instruments were submitted to the United Nations Secretariat on 20 May of the same year, making Croatia, I can proudly mention, the twelfth country to ratify this important document.

The Republic of Croatia continues to welcome all efforts leading towards the global ban on anti-personnel landmines. We also welcome all constructive proposals and projects enabling the realization of a total prohibition of the use and of the destruction of landmines, and we stand ready to cooperate with all other mine-affected countries, primarily in the field of exchanging experiences related to mine detection and underwater demining. In that respect, the Croatian team of experts is looking for the most favourable solutions for achieving the safest and most cost-effective projects which would enable an efficient demining process.

Croatia is one of the most mine-affected countries in the world, with close to 1 million mines buried on its territory. Ten per cent of the total surface of the Republic of Croatia is mine-contaminated. Such a high percentage of mines represents tremendous obstacles to normal functioning of life in these areas, particularly in predominately agricultural regions, hampering the return of refugees and displaced persons to their homes.

If one puts aside the economic and infrastructure problems that are very evident in the mine-affected areas, human safety is the factor that certainly prevails. It is precisely the humanitarian nature of the Ottawa movement that has most contributed to the creation of political will and readiness to support this praiseworthy initiative. The effectiveness of anti-personnel mines in military conflicts, often used as an argument by those still unwilling to sign the Ottawa Convention, indeed has proven to be a superfluous element in modern warfare, according to many military analysts and experts. Therefore, as I am sure you all agree, civilian casualties in the aftermath of military conflicts are the only result of the usage of these, I dare say, monstrous devices designed to kill mostly civilians. While speaking of casualties, I must mention that during the past few years, 560 victims of landmines were registered in the Republic of Croatia, 120 of whom were killed.

In order to fight the problem, the demining process in Croatia is proceeding well and is being carried out in accordance with the highest international standards. The United Nations established the Mine Action Centre in Croatia in 1996, which merged with the Croatian Mine Action Centre established in 1998. The mine clearance process is not only frightfully dangerous and time consuming, but it is also a very expensive activity. The cost of mine clearing and other demining-related activities in the Republic of Croatia has, in the past few years, amounted to nearly $150 million. The Government of Croatia has borne 90 per cent of those costs, while 10 per cent has been covered from a donation fund. We are looking forward to the realization of next year's estimated rise in foreign donations to 20 per cent of the total amount required. We are very thankful to all countries, particulary Switzerland, Norway, Germany, Canada, the United States, Japan, Sweden, Belgium, the United Kingdom and Italy; international organizations, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, the World Bank and the United Nations Mine Action Service; regional organizations, such as the European Union and the West European Union; and non-governmental organizations such as the Slovenian International Trust Fund, for their valuable contributions.

Experts have estimated that 10 more years of mine clearance are needed to be able to say that most of the work has been done. At this moment we have 800 well-trained and highly skilled experts working in the field. Some of them have been asked to help in the efforts of the international community to clear as many mines as possible in the most sensitive locations before winter arrives in Kosovo, and they have responded very quickly. Currently, the Croatian Mine Assistance Centre, together with the Slovenian International Trust Fund, supported by the United States Government, is working on establishing a regional centre for training mine experts and for testing new technologies.

Croatia looks to the follow-up of the Ottawa process as a catalyst for genuinely advancing mine action throughout the world. Based on our own experience, we firmly believe that more forceful action is required at national, regional and global levels.

As an indicator of our continuous efforts concerning the Ottawa Convention, allow me to inform you of the Regional Mine Action Conference which took place in Zagreb in June this year and which was a follow-up to the first Regional Conference on Landmines, held in Budapest in March 1998. The Conference provided a

forum for a broad exchange of views on recent international and regional mine action developments. The Conference also gave us an opportunity to assess the ongoing programmes in demining and mine-victim assistance and rehabilitation, and it gave political impetus to increasing regional and international cooperation and coordination to meet this challenge. The participation of His Excellency Cornelio Sommaruga, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, was highly appreciated by all participants.

Croatia will work hard with all interested countries to support the Ottawa Convention in its next phase. The resolution now under consideration on assistance in mine action should provide a useful input to our deliberations on the preparatory process. The United Nations role in increasing international mine-related activities and cooperation remains indisputable, and we look forward to its continuing contribution.

Finally, mine action is indeed about people. It is about enabling all of us to live in an environment free from physical, socio-economic and psychological entrapments caused by these callous and indiscriminate killers. Let us make these worthwhile efforts a reality for all.

Mr. Kolby (Norway): This year has been marked by several events adding to the remarkable history of the battle against the scourge of anti-personnel landmines. The Convention on the Prohibition of Mines entered into force on 1 March. With the successful outcome of the First Meeting of the States Parties in May, the Maputo Declaration and the adoption of an inter-sessional work plan, the Convention was established as the primary framework for strategic efforts in resolving the serious humanitarian problems caused by anti-personnel landmines. The true value of the Convention, however, rests on its sustained realization of tangible results in the field. Mine action efforts will not be viable unless we are assured that no new anti-personnel landmines will be emplaced. We urge all those States that have not yet signed and ratified the Convention to do so.

Norway welcomes the Secretary-General's report on assistance in mine action presented to the General Assembly, giving an overview of the activities of the United Nations system and its interaction with other partners. We appreciate the efforts on the part of the United Nations system in moving from policy formulation to policy implementation. We fully share the approach whereby mine action from an early stage constitutes an integral part of the Organization's broader response to humanitarian crises, reconstruction and development efforts in situations involving the aftermath of conflict.

Mine action cannot be perceived as a mere technical operation. We need to better understand the socio-economic and development implications of the scourge of landmines and the benefits of mine action. At the same time, we must not lose sight of the true essence of progress in the field — that is, to remove landmines from the ground and minimize the risk for people living with the constant threat and terror created by the presence of these weapons.

The United Nations plays a central role in global mine action. We appreciate the role that the United Nations Mine Action Service is playing as the focal point for mine action within the United Nations system. We have contributed to the Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Action in support of the activities of the United Nations Mine Action Service, and we will continue to do so in a flexible manner. The United Nations portfolio on mine action programmes is a tool that hopefully will also be used more actively by Governments as a basis for funding.

The broad-based United Nations assessment missions are important in the planning of future programmes. In this regard, we would stress that it is important for mine-affected countries to give access to the United Nations teams. We also appreciate the contribution by the different United Nations agencies in the development of an integrated approach to dealing effectively with the complexity of the landmine problems.

The revision of international standards for humanitarian mine clearance and the development of international test procedures and guidelines for the use of mine detection dogs and mechanical mine clearance equipment are also greatly appreciated. They will make mine action programmes more effective and reduce accident rates and incidents of incomplete clearance. In order to improve international standards, procedures and guidelines, it is necessary to include the experience and considerations of mine-affected countries, interested States and the operators in the field.

Furthermore, we welcome the project initiated by the United Nations Development Programme on identifying socio-economic indicators for mine action programmes. A clearer picture of the impact of the presence of landmines on people and societies will facilitate improved prioritization.

States, international organizations and non-governmental organizations form a powerful network with the potential to tackle the various aspects of mine action. The inter-sessional work within the framework of the Mine Ban Convention with the standing committees of experts constitute an arena for mine action open for all actors to contribute to the goal of the Convention: a world free of anti-personnel landmines. We look forward to the active participation of the United Nations Mine Action Service and the relevant United Nations agencies in this endeavour.

Predictable and stable funding is necessary to carry out mine action programmes effectively. Norway has made a commitment of $120 million dollars over a five-year period. During 1998 and 1999, more than $45 million dollars have been channelled directly to mine action projects. I would like to highlight a few points which Norway regards as particularly relevant with regard to the implementation of mine action programmes.

First, there is a need to make better use of coordination mechanisms at the country level, preferably headed by national authorities. These groups should include donors, international organizations and national and international non-governmental organizations, and they should work closely with mine action coordination centres in order to ensure effective coordination, prioritization and planning.

Secondly, the United Nations Mine Action Coordination Centre in Kosovo demonstrates one example of effective implementation and coordination. The Kosovo model has managed to encompass all major mine action actors in one homogeneous structure. This approach should be shared with other mine action programmes, though we need to bear in mind that each situation is different and requires its own specific solution.

Thirdly, the early introduction of the Information Management System for Mine Action in Kosovo has been a great asset to the operation. For the first time, all actors involved in mine action, both military and civilian, are able to communicate on the same information platform. We encourage the United Nations to further introduce this management tool in existing programmes.

Finally, assistance to mine victims is a central part of mine action activities. Existing structures within the health and social sectors should be reinforced and services and programmes intended for mine victims should include all persons with disabilities, regardless of the cause. International organizations, donors and affected States should examine further ways of enhancing assistance to mine victims, including socio-economic reintegration. We hope these issues, as well as other thematic questions such as the socio-economic impact of landmines, can be addressed in the report of the Secretary- General next year.

We look forward to continuing our close collaboration with the United Nations system and mine-affected countries, as well as other interested States and non-governmental organizations, in meeting the challenges ahead.

Mr. Ortique (United States of America): Near the start of this century, just 10 per cent of war-time casualties were civilians. More recently, the figure has grown to 90 per cent. This stunning reversal is not due entirely to landmines, but landmines do tell us a great deal about the brutal and indiscriminate nature of conflict in our time. Notwithstanding removal efforts, an estimated 70 million landmines still scar the surface of our world.

These weapons are a terrible humanitarian problem, but they also slow political development and retard economic progress. They keep refugees from going home and the displaced from their land long after the guns of war fall silent. They are cheap to buy, easy to use, hard to detect and difficult to remove. They do the most harm to societies that can least afford to clear mines, to caution their civilians, to care for victims or to cope with the loss of their agricultural land. Above all, they endanger those who endanger no one by creating fear in the innocent and the young, far too frequently crippling them or too often taking their very lives.

Realistically, President Clinton and Vice-President Gore have made it a goal of the United States to help end the threat posed by landmines to civilians of every part of every region of every continent around the world before the turn of the next decade. Since 1993 the United States has provided more than $350 million to this effort, four times that of any other country. Today we are helping some 30 countries to map and clear their most dangerous minefields, to train local deminers and to teach children and adults how to identify and avoid mines. We are working with groups such as the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation, the Landmine Survivors Network and the Patrick Leahy War Victims Fund to assist and to counsel landmine survivors in more than a dozen countries.

We are using the best scientific talents presently available to improve mine detection and clearance techniques. But, regrettably, as the twenty-first century is about to dawn, the technology most commonly used to find mines around the world is still a stick attached to a human arm. Mankind, which relentlessly pursues pathways to the other planets and beyond, can and must do better than this.

That is why my country is creating testing centres and funding research at 14 universities around the country. And that is why the National Aeronautics and Space Administration has a project to apply the same techniques used in trying to detect life on Mars to the task of finding landmines, thereby protecting life on Earth.

Eliminating the landmine threat to civilians by the end of the coming decade is a daunting challenge, but I am convinced that it is attainable. There have been real success stories along the way to encourage us. In Cambodia, for example, the landmine accident rate has been reduced by 90 per cent — the difference between health and injury or death for more than 5,000 Cambodians this year alone. In Afghanistan hundreds of thousands of acres previously lost to mines are now supporting productive crops. In Mozambique refugees have returned home on 4,000 miles of roads that have been cleared of their mines. Great strides have also been made in Central Europe and Central America. Governments alone did not make this progress. But the only way to reach our larger goal is for countries, non-governmental groups and people all over the world to work together.

In the United States the private sector and voluntary organizations have responded to the landmine crisis with generosity, creativity and heart. The United Nations Association of the United States of America is sponsoring the Adopt-A-Minefield Campaign. Already 40 groups around the country have raised more than $2 million to clear a path to a safer world.

I would respectfully suggest that it is frequently appropriate to seek simple pursuits and engage less sophisticated educational tools that are significantly successful in saving lives. For example, DC Comics and the United Nations Children's Fund are producing comic books for Bosnia, Central America and Kosovo in which Superman and Wonderwoman teach kids and their parents how to spot and stay away from landmines. The Marshall Legacy Institute has launched a canine corps, a programme to use dogs to sniff out mines around the world. The Humane Society is also involved, because they recognize that mines kill hundreds of thousands of animals every year.

These are simplistic efforts, but effective. Simplistic, but successful. Thus the United States is the world's leader in civilian humanitarian demining, but, as I have emphasized, this is not and cannot be a solo proposition. We can succeed only by continuing to collaborate with mine-affected countries, with the United Nations, with private groups and with foreign donors.

Every day, mine by mine, acre by acre, people across our globe are reclaiming their lands and moving closer, with every safe and silent step, to a life filled with hope and free from fear. By working to eliminate this scourge in the lives of the innocent, we secure our future, but we also secure their future in the breast of a tranquil peace for all of the world.

With persistence, determination and generosity, all of us must continue to progress, because, as we look to the new century, there could be no more appropriate a goal than enabling every child everywhere to walk our earth in the rapture of peace, justice and safety. With this I challenge my fellow representatives, and I thank you, Mr. President, for giving me the opportunity to do so.

Mr. Jayanama (Thailand): On behalf of the Thai delegation, I would like to express my appreciation to the Secretary-General for his report on "Assistance in mine action" dated 6 October 1999. The report's review of coordinated mine action, the activities of agencies within the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations, and the various country programmes provides a comprehensive picture of, and useful information on, the current state of play on this important issue. More significantly, it highlights once again the continuing dangerous threat posed by landmines and unexploded ordnance to all people, regardless of gender, race or age.

Landmines not only kill and maim indiscriminately, claiming the lives of innocent civilians, including women and children, but they also hamper socio-economic development, divert scarce resources from more productive activities and instil constant fear and insecurity among the local population. Landmines are cheap to produce and easily deployed, but the costs of their removal are a hundred times higher, not to mention the incalculable human toll, which could not be valued in terms of dollars and cents. Landmines undoubtedly pose a pre-eminent threat to human security.

Although Thailand neither produces nor exports landmines, it knows only too well their devastating consequences on people's lives and welfare through firsthand experience of the spillover effects of armed conflicts in neighbouring countries over the past 30 years. About 796 square kilometres of our border areas are infested with anti-personnel landmines and unexploded ordnance. Countless Thai children, as well as those of displaced persons, have lost their lives or become amputees. Even more have been orphaned.

For these reasons, Thailand strongly supports the goal of "zero victims" and all international efforts to resolve the landmine threat once and for all. These should include not only mine clearance but also mine-awareness development, mine-victim assistance and the rehabilitation of mined areas.

The process engendered by the signing and coming into force of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, known as the Ottawa Convention, is one that Thailand fully embraces. In our view, this process should be further reinforced through concrete steps taken both on the ground and in international forums. In this context, we welcome the renewed commitment to the total eradication of landmines contained in the Maputo Declaration of the inaugural Meeting of the States Parties to the 1999 Ottawa Convention, as well as the inter-sessional work programme. We hope that the informal standing committees of experts established in Maputo will add impetus to international cooperation and to the momentum of assistance in this area, so that closer coordination of efforts with all concerned parties at the international, regional and subregional levels would be effected.

The need for effective coordination cannot be overemphasized. In this connection, we welcome the establishment of the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) and commend its efforts in coordinating mine action activities among different United Nations agencies and other organizations.

For its part, Thailand has undertaken numerous efforts towards the elimination of the threat of landmines. We ratified the Ottawa Convention on 27 November last year. On 1 May 1999, the day the Ottawa Convention entered into force for Thailand, we destroyed 10,000 anti-personnel landmines in stock, thus becoming the first developing country to destroy mines as stipulated in the Convention.

To rationalize mine action efforts at the national level, the Thailand Mine Action Centre (TMAC) was established in December last year as the focal point for mine action in the country. The Centre is responsible for drafting the national strategic plan on mine action, which includes information dissemination on mine action activities, demining, destroying mines in stockpile, conducting training and providing assistance to mine victims. The Centre also works closely with both international and Thai non-governmental organizations, including the Thailand Campaign to Ban Landmines, which is affiliated with the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, the recipient of the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize.

Some of the specific activities being planned by the Centre include the following: conducting a level 1 survey in order to help establish a national database on the mine situation and its impact, pending approval by the United Nations Mine Action Service; fencing and marking mined areas in accordance with article 7 of the Ottawa Convention, which deals with transparency measures; and developing a "training of trainers" programme for demining.

The successful completion of these projects, however, requires assistance from the international community. We thus call on the United Nations Mine Action Service to provide the necessary funds for the level 1 study project. We believe international assistance to mine-affected countries, which are mostly developing countries, whether for mine clearance or humanitarian assistance both to victims and survivors of landmines, is a vital element of cooperation in mine action. The voluntary trust fund for assistance in mine action is thus a necessity.

Thailand also supports cooperation in mine action at the regional level. Such cooperation has taken place along the Thai-Cambodian border, the area of the largest concentration of landmines in Thailand. The Thai Government's past contributions to mine clearance efforts in Cambodia, made in collaboration with the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia in 1992 and 1993, are well known. More recently, in February this year, Thailand and Cambodia agreed to take all the necessary steps to make their common borders free from all landmines within three years and to establish joint projects on mine clearance and other related activities. This initiative is an exemplary stepping stone for enhanced cooperation among countries in the region to eliminate the common threat of landmines. We hope that

such humanitarian cooperation with other neighbours will also be possible in the near future.

We in the international community are committed to achieving peace, security and prosperity for all people in the next millennium, and the total elimination of landmines is certainly one of our foremost tasks. Although the harm and suffering brought about by this indiscriminate weapon of terror cannot be undone overnight, we hope that, in our enlightenment, we can make up for our past errors. Through strong commitment and joint action, we can help remove the threat that landmines pose, as well as alleviate the suffering they have caused to more than a few generations of mankind.

Ms. Molaroni (San Marino): The Republic of San Marino was among the first countries to ratify the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, because it realized its importance and its great implications for human lives. We are extremely satisfied to see that it has finally entered into force, and we hope that more and more countries will not only become parties to it but will start to implement its articles as soon as possible.

At the First Meeting of the States Parties to the Ottawa Convention, held in Maputo, the States parties wisely decided on an inter-sessional programme of work and established five informal standing committees of experts on mine clearance; victim assistance, socio-economic reintegration and mine awareness; technologies for mine action; stockpile destruction; and general status and operation of the Convention.

To date, 136 countries have signed the Ottawa Convention and 88 have ratified it. The Convention requires that States parties destroy stockpiled anti-personnel mines within four years of ratification and eliminate the mines already in the ground within 10 years. Unfortunately, the process of demining takes much longer in many cases, due to the lack of adequate funding, infrastructures, programmes, coordination and expertise. Worse still, it is due in many instances to the excessive bureaucracy and the need to protect economic interests.

Eighty-seven countries and eight other areas in the world are affected by both landmines and unexploded ordnance; 27 of the countries affected are States parties to the Convention, 23 are signatories and 37 have not yet joined it. In Africa, of 48 countries, 26 are affected by landmines, and in America, 9 out of 35 countries have them. In Asia, 16 out of 39 countries have landmines; in Europe and Central Asia, 23 countries have them; and in the Middle East and North Africa, 13 out of 18 countries are affected by this plague.

All of this data may give the impression that the world has precise information about the nature of this problem, but that is not the case. The lack of proper and accurate information about the dissemination of landmines is substantial. Many projects are being carried out at this very moment to ascertain the dimensions of landmine infestation in particular countries, but even so the data is fragmented and incomplete. In Africa, the worst affected area of the globe, only one third of the affected countries have undergone some kind of survey on the landmine situation. The Republic of San Marino is deeply convinced that mine awareness is a cornerstone of mine action and that information and education are the main tools to reduce the landmine threat.

Humanitarian mine clearance is a relatively new discipline. It involves the technical issues of detecting and destroying various mines and ammunition, and the managerial, developmental, social and financial aspects of implementing large programmes in a broad variety of scenarios. Up until now, most humanitarian programmes have been funded in a fragmented manner, on a short-term basis and with short planning horizons. Even so, in the majority of countries, the capacities and the programmes exist to implement mine clearance, although they are not always exploited in the best way. Too many countries still ignore the situation and non-governmental organizations are left alone to work towards that goal. In other countries, programmes are operated by military units or commercial entrepreneurs, and there is no actual assurance of a long-lasting results. In fact, if Governments do not commit themselves to respecting international standards, we can have very low expectations about the total elimination of this scourge.

I would like to avail myself of this opportunity to commend the work of the United Nations Mine Action Service, among all other international and national institutions, and its staff, who have succeeded in achieving great results, notwithstanding the scarce funding. The Mine Action Service adopted an inter-agency approach, identifying local conditions and concerns and making it possible to tailor mine action assistance to fit individual countries' needs. For this reason, San Marino has decided to make a voluntary contribution to its projects. This contribution underlines

the active commitment of my country and is given in recognition of all the efforts of the Mine Action Service.

Mine awareness efforts represent an important part of the programmes to reduce human risk. Educational mechanisms focusing on changing risk behaviours and creating awareness of safety measures are a necessity if we want to reduce the number of landmine victims during the process of demining, which in many cases can last years.

For a considerable time, San Marino has been making its contribution, on an understandably small scale, to projects to improve social awareness of arms and landmines in various affected areas of the globe. For next year, my Government has already allocated some voluntary funds to finance projects in these areas, and we hope that more and more countries will soon join us. However, landmines and unexploded ordnance awareness programmes exist in only 40 of the 87 affected countries. That is definitely not enough.

A further aspect of the question is the survey process, which makes it possible to identify and to map problem areas and allocate resources according to the density of landmines and the higher risk factors. San Marino believes that priority should be given to densely populated areas of the globe, that people should come first and that we should direct our action to alleviating the suffering of those populations that risk their lives every day.

For all of those reasons, we will always support this item in the General Assembly and in the First Committee until landmines become a distant memory. That will be one of the greatest victories of the United Nations.

Mr. Kittikhoun (Lao People's Democratic Republic): At the outset, my delegation would like to convey its appreciation to the Secretary-General for his comprehensive and informative report on assistance in mine action, contained in document A/54/445. The report presents a useful overview of mine action currently undertaken by United Nations programmes and other related agencies.

The question of mines and other unexploded ordnance resulting from protracted wars, regional conflicts and internal struggles continues to be a matter of special concern for the international community. Though national and local approaches to the problem of mine clearance have existed for decades, millions of landmines and other unexploded ordnance are still buried in the soil or scattered on the surface in over 60 countries around the world, and thousands of innocent people are being killed or injured every day. While causing great suffering and death to innocent people, these hidden killers also create tremendous obstacles to the development of the economic and social infrastructure of the affected nations. Every effort should therefore be made to intensify international cooperation in mine actions. My delegation firmly believes that only through such a collective effort can human beings live safe from these killers.

The Lao People's Democratic Republic is today seriously affected by unexploded ordnance as a result of the heaviest aerial bombardment during the Indo-China war, especially between 1964 and 1973. During this period, over 500,000 bombing missions were launched, dropping more than two million tons of bombs on this small country of 4.5 million inhabitants. Most of the bombing consisted of anti-personnel cluster bombs filled with 670 bomblets or "bombies", as they are known in Laos, that were intended to explode on or shortly after impact. Whereas the manufacturers of this ordnance estimated a failure rate of as low as 10 per cent, it is now generally agreed that the actual failure rate may have been as high as 30 per cent. Extensive ground battles in several provinces also left staggering amounts of unexploded ordnance, including mortar and artillery shells, mines, sub-munitions and other devices of various origins, which gives the Lao People's Democratic Republic the distinction of being one of the most heavily ordnance-contaminated nations in the world.

Twenty-five years after the end of the war, unexploded ordnance contamination still affects up to 50 per cent of the landmass of the Lao People's Democratic Republic. Bomblets can be found everywhere, in villages and towns, along roads, on hillsides, in gardens and rice fields. They do not choose, but rather strike all their victims equally, including children, women and subsistence farmers.

The Lao Government has drawn up a comprehensive programme to address this problem in all its humanitarian, social and environmental dimensions. Within a framework of integrating our efforts, the Lao National Unexploded Ordnance Programme, known as UXO Lao, has been set up with the objectives of reducing the number of civilian casualties from unexploded ordnance and increasing the amount of land available for food production and other development activities.

UXO Lao activities are divided into four important components, including Community Awareness, Training

and Capacity Building, Survey, and Clearance. The programme is now fully operational in 9 of 15 unexploded ordnance-contaminated provinces and has a national staff of 880 supported by 32 international advisors.

According to the 1998 annual report, 269 students graduated from the National Training Centre and have joined those now serving in the field; and 67,875 items of ordnance were destroyed across the country, exceeding the target of 45,000 items. Equally important, over 292 hectares of agriculture land and land for development were cleared of unexploded ordnance. This far exceeded the yearly target, which had been set at 200 hectares. With regard to community awareness activities, some 556 villages were visited and over 161,000 people were briefed on the dangers of unexploded ordnance; roving teams also visited 1,392 villages in response to emergency requests.

Despite the progress made, unfortunately, there were still 89 accidents related to unexploded ordnance reported during 1998; in those, 59 people were seriously injured and 30 people were killed. In the first months of 1999, the accident rate and number of injuries were higher than during the same period of 1998. This increase reflects, among other things, improved reporting mechanisms and growing pressure for access to new land.

The UXO Lao Trust Fund, supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), continues to be the main channel for contributions to the work of UXO Lao. Over the past three years, funding has been provided by UNDP, UNICEF, the European Union and the Governments of Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Japan, Finland, France, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, the United States and the United Kingdom. The programme is also supported by some international implementing partners such as Handicap International, the Mine Advisory Group and Norwegian People's Aid, among others. In this regard, my delegation would like to take this opportunity to express its sincere appreciation to all donors for the generous assistance and support which have rendered the UXO Lao Trust Fund activities possible.

The approximate overall mobilization target for the year 2000 is over 13 million dollars, to be received either as cash or in-kind contributions. The fund available nevertheless is little more than $4 million. We are therefore quite concerned about this reduction in contributions. Due to shortfalls in donor support, the status of the programme remains uncertain and the current level of operations will not be sustainable in the future. Therefore, together with UNDP and UNICEF, we will continue to try hard to secure the necessary funding for programme operations for the year 2000 and beyond. In this connection, it is our fervent hope that the international community will continue to lend its support and assistance to our arduous efforts to achieve the objectives set out in the programme.

As we stand at the threshold of the new century, let us rededicate ourselves to demining activities so as to give peoples the opportunity to live in an environment free from the physical, socio-economic and psychological traps these killers create and to ensure that those now living with the threat of landmines will have the chance to enjoy a peaceful and productive existence. We believe that only through concerted global efforts and cooperation, with the United Nations as a focal point for mine action, will we be able to accomplish the huge tasks that lie ahead.

Mr. Livermore (Canada): The report of the Secretary-General on mine action highlights both the challenges that lie before the international community and the strategies required to address this issue in a comprehensive fashion. Canada wishes to express its appreciation to the Secretary-General for providing such a comprehensive and timely report.

I was forcefully struck by the magnitude and seriousness of the landmine problem when I visited the most mine-affected State in the Americas — Nicaragua — earlier this month. I talked to people who live in fear of the very ground on which they walk. I met with survivors of landmine incidents. I saw tracts of land rendered unusable because of the suspected presence of mines. The scenes I witnessed in Nicaragua are repeated all too often in post-conflict situations throughout the world. In Croatia, Cambodia, Mozambique, Yemen and dozens of other States, citizens and societies must contend with the deadly legacy of landmines in their attempts to rebuild lives and communities long after conflicts have ended.

Yet, in addition to witnessing the devastating impact of mines, while in Nicaragua I also saw the hope that flows from international efforts to address the impact of landmines. Through the cooperation of civil society, non-governmental organizations, the military and the Organization of American States (OAS), hundreds of thousands of square metres of land have been cleared in

Nicaragua and a work programme has been established to complete the task.

(spoke in French)

Through the OAS, the United Nations, other international governmental and non-governmental organizations, and other institutional arrangements, Canada has committed more than $1 million to support mine-action activities in Nicaragua.

(spoke in English)

Our commitment to mine clearance is multifaceted. In South America, Canada is supporting mine clearance along the Peru-Ecuador border. In the Middle East, Canada has provided equipment and training to Jordan's demining programme. In Europe, Canada has made major commitments to mine clearance in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo. In Africa, Canada has made a multimillion-dollar investment in Mozambique's mine-action programme. And in Asia, Canada is continuing its long-standing commitment to assist Cambodia with its devastating mine problem.

Since the signing of the Ottawa Convention in December 1997, Canada has disbursed more than Can$10 million in support of mine-clearance operations. The role of the United Nations — of the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) and the United Nations Development Programme — in mobilizing donor support and organizing programmes in mine-affected countries has been truly impressive.

Clearing mined land is, of course, only one aspect of mine action. Governments, along with international and non-governmental organizations, must take action to prevent new mine casualties and to provide assistance to survivors of mine incidents. Canada applauds the leadership of the United Nations Children's Fund in providing mine-awareness education to populations at risk, as well as in developing international guidelines for raising public awareness about landmines and unexploded ordnance. Canada has supported mine-awareness programmes in Afghanistan, Angola, Iraq, Laos and Yemen.

We also recognize that the international community as a whole has an obligation to meet the needs of survivors of landmine incidents. Canada's commitment to victim assistance is a global one, including support to programmes in Cambodia, Afghanistan and Uganda, as well as a multimillion-dollar commitment to the Pan American Health Organization's victim-assistance programme in Central America.

The essence of successfully addressing the landmine problem is developing comprehensive, workable strategies to meet each situation. We agree with the Secretary-General that at the heart of mine action are assessment missions, comprehensive national surveys and other mine-related information activities, effective coordination and information management, and research into and development of mine-related technologies. As a lead proponent of national level 1 surveys, we have made multimillion-dollar commitments to surveys in Yemen and Mozambique.

(spoke in French)

In addition, Canada is committed to increasing the quantity and quality of other information that will strengthen mine-action efforts. We are supporting the pilot testing of victim-assistance information tools in Afghanistan and a project in eastern Africa.

(spoke in English)

With respect to coordination, Canada emphasizes the important coordination and priority-setting role of the United Nations Mine Action Service. Over the past two years Canada has helped to fund some of the core activities of UNMAS. This year we provided it with a database that will enable mine-action donors to communicate about their mine-action efforts.

Advocacy remains an exceptionally important component of mine action. Through measures like advocacy in support of the comprehensive ban on anti-personnel mines, we can help to ensure that the landmine problem does not worsen. We applaud the work of literally hundreds of non-governmental organizations, many under the auspices of the International Campaign to Ban Land Mines, which are the very heart and soul of international advocacy and which have continued to work to make the landmine ban treaty as universal as possible.

(spoke in French)

One of the most important ways to prevent the exacerbation of the landmine problem is to destroy mine stocks. Canada commends those States that have partially or completely destroyed their mine stocks, and we call on all signatories to the Ottawa Convention to finalize a

timetable for the destruction of their stocks. Canada is working in partnership with Ukraine to assist in the destruction of its anti-personnel mines, and we urge other States which have the means to do so to provide similar assistance wherever it may be needed.

(spoke in English)

If we are to eradicate the devastating impact of landmines, we must continue to support the full spectrum of activities which form part of mine action. For the 89 States parties to the Ottawa Convention, providing assistance to international mine-related activities is an obligation. Canada also values the contributions of other States which have yet to ratify the Convention. While we welcome the statements of several States which have forsworn the production, stockpiling, use or transfer of anti-personnel mines, we should be clear that our ultimate goal is the universal acceptance of the total ban on anti-personnel mines through adherence to the landmine ban Convention. Until we attain this goal, the human security of individuals throughout the world in this area cannot be guaranteed. We should therefore make it our collective goal to increase the numbers of ratifications, attaining at least 100 prior to 1 March, 2000, the first anniversary of the entry into force of the Convention.

Hand in hand with the issue of ratification is the full and effective implementation of the Convention. We congratulate the Government of Mozambique on hosting the highly successful First Meeting of States Parties in Maputo in May of this year. We look forward with anticipation to the second meeting next year in Geneva. The inter-sessional work programme established under the Convention has been launched successfully and will address such crucial issues as technology and stockpile destruction at forthcoming sessions in Geneva. To make this inter-sessional work programme effective, we urge all States parties to provide complete and timely information, as required under article 7, and we invite all States which have yet to ratify the Convention to provide, on a voluntary basis, the information described in article 7.

When I travel within or outside of Canada, I am often asked: What difference has the Ottawa Convention made? The answer is simple: The Convention has provided the international community with a framework for action with respect to the mine problem, planting the seeds of hope that this is an issue on the way to solution. It has also established an international standard. No longer will countries be able to use landmines with impunity. Mined land is being cleared and returned to the community. In Croatia, 50 per cent of all mined roads, infrastructure and inhabited areas have been cleared. Casualty rates are dropping. In Afghanistan and Cambodia, casualty rates fell by almost half between 1993 and 1998.

Landmine survivors are now receiving more services and greater recognition. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, 38 clinics have been set up, providing a full range of services to landmine victims. Stockpiled mines are also being destroyed at an impressive rate. Since the beginning of the Ottawa process, over 14 million mines have been destroyed.

This is not yet a battle won, but over the past two years and more we have turned the corner in addressing a severe humanitarian crisis. The challenges ahead are to maintain the momentum and to continue to work constructively together. The leadership of the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross, as well as the support of all international organizations, are crucial to this process. We offer the Secretary-General Canada's continued cooperation and our utmost support to achieve a world that is truly mine-free.

Mr. Amer (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*spoke in Arabic*): Today, the General Assembly is considering for the seventh consecutive time the important item on assistance in mine action. I should like to express our full appreciation to the Secretary-General for his report, which contains most valuable information on the clearance of mines, which affect almost half the States Members of the United Nations. The report refers to the First Meeting of the States Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, held in May. This very important Meeting marked a new stage in international demining efforts.

Mines threaten human life everywhere and have serious social and economic consequences. For this and other reasons, we have followed with great interest the demining efforts of States and attended the First Meeting in our capacity as an observer. We maintain our observer status because we have some reservations about the Convention. We believe that the Convention is selective and does not take into account the need to identify the legal responsibility of colonial States that have laid mines on the territories of other States. This issue should be considered in the context of the Convention if the real goal is the total abolition of mines and the dangers they pose to all humanity.

For over 50 years now, my country has been the victim of mines laid by other countries. During the Second World War, the warring armies laid mines over vast swaths of Libyan territory. Studies have shown that there are tens of millions of such mines in Libya. One study carried out by a group of United Nations experts determined that, in the course of various campaigns in North Africa, the Allies and the Axis forces laid between 5 and 19 million explosives and mines. The victorious as well as the defeated armies left the countries of the region, abandoning the mines and the explosives that they had planted and stockpiled.

These mines are now covered by sand and rubble. They occasionally explode, claiming men, women, children and the elderly as victims, who may be mutilated, handicapped, blinded or killed. Many have fallen to date. The study cited in the report before us describes the large number of victims, echoing a previous study cited in document A/38/383, which noted that, in the 30 years following the Second World War, 4,000 Libyans were killed by mines and many thousands more wounded, including women and children.

Mines have claimed other victims as well: thousands of sheep and cattle. They have shut down roads and other means of transportation and hindered our efforts to combat desertification and undertake agrarian reform. The United Nations report issued five years ago shows that about 27 per cent of Libya's cultivable land is strewn with mines. This has been an obstacle to our country's development, especially in the coastal areas. The existence of mines has also hindered the exploitation of natural resources such as oil, gypsum and iron ore. To cope with this problem, we have devised several demining awareness and training programmes.

The facts show that mine clearance with the means presently available is a very difficult undertaking because lands strewn with mines are vast and Libya does not have maps or enough information about the location of these mines. In order to deal with these problems, Libya, like other States, welcomes any assistance provided by the United Nations in the area of mine clearance. Whatever the assistance or however much it is, it will never be enough to rid us of the mines and explosives laid in our territory.

I should like to draw attention to the fact that the countries that have laid mines in our territory are the parties primarily responsible for their clearance and for compensating for all damages and losses resulting from such mines. This is a principle that has been adopted by many regional and international organizations, such as the Non-Aligned Movement, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the Organization of African Unity and the General Assembly. The latter adopted a resolution requesting States that have laid mines to make available to the victim States the geographical location and maps of such mines. These provisions also allow for compensation to be paid to the victim States.

In other resolutions, there are similar provisions to the effect that the responsibility for those mines and for the effects of war is incumbent upon States that have laid the mines and caused the damage. They should therefore offer technical assistance and necessary information, compensate States and help them in every way in their demining efforts.

We have expressed earlier our satisfaction with the agreement that we reached with Italy in July 1998 for removing the mines laid in our territory during the Second World War. We are pleased with the ensuing cooperation and the practical measures taken to train people in mine clearance and to establish a medical centre for the treatment and rehabilitation of victims of these mines.

This agreement with Italy is a very positive one. It can serve as an example for the other two States that have placed mines on our territory — the United Kingdom and Germany. These countries should cooperate with us in putting an end to this problem in all its aspects by providing us with locator geographical maps for those mines, as well as providing assistance and compensation to our people who have suffered from these attacks for more than 50 years.

I wish to thank once again the United Nations, non-governmental organizations and specialized agencies for their efforts to cooperate with us on mine clearance. However, such efforts have so far been focused on mines laid under specific circumstances. The Secretary-General told us that the activities conducted by the United Nations should deal with other aspects as well. The report does not refer to mines laid a long time ago, between the two World Wars, and we hope that this will cover all mines, the most recent as well the older ones. It is a devastating force, and the older mines, like the newer ones, limit our agrarian reforms and economic development.

In addition to causing suffering, human losses and damage to the environment, all mines are obstacles to development. This is a matter of interest to the entire

international community, which should spare no effort to remove all mines from the earth and eliminate this danger which threatens this generation and future ones.

Mr. de Beauvais (France) (*spoke in French*): The French delegation fully associates itself with the statement made on behalf of the European Union. The draft resolution on assistance in mine action, introduced by the representative of Finland in the Presidency of the European Union, attests to the dedication of the 15 Union members to the Ottawa Convention, to their will to actively contribute to its universalization and to their interest in the most appropriate means to achieve this goal.

The draft resolution highlights in particular significant developments regarding the issue of technologies made available to the international mine clearance community and notes the shortcomings in available equipment for detection and for removing mines which is reliable and financially accessible. The draft resolution therefore calls once again for the strengthening of international cooperation in order to have a rapid improvement of needed technologies.

This aspect of the struggle to eradicate the scourge of anti-personnel mines deserves our attention for two major reasons: technological progress, which is the indispensable key to decisive progress in the field regarding weapons disseminated in huge numbers over vast areas, in 60 countries; and promising scientific progress which we see today here and there. However, a realistic inventory of what can be done today highlights the very traditional nature of the equipment most often used, the too low level of security for those engaged in mine clearance and the very slow pace of demining operations.

Therefore, the European Union once again launches a double appeal to all those who have the means — Member States, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, public and private foundations — to provide victim countries appropriate technological assistance and to promote a coordinated effort of research and development likely to come up with safer, more effective and less costly methods of technology. It is also relevant to emphasize, as the draft resolution does, how much the efforts of this kind will be enhanced if they are accompanied by normative activities that are genuinely universal in terms of their technical scope as well as their geographical range.

Among the standing committees of experts formed by the States parties to the Ottawa Convention last May in Maputo, one committee — to which the chairmanship was jointly entrusted, until the next Meeting of the States Parties, to Cambodia and France — is responsible for mine clearance technology. Its mandate covers various aspects, to which brief reference was just made, and that is the burden and the importance of its task.

Called upon to meet in Geneva, at the International Humanitarian Demining Centre next December and then in May next year, it will engage first in an exhaustive and critical inventory of the needs of users. Later it will review existing techniques and technologies and those being planned in order to be able to provide, in September 2000 to the States parties, realistic and balanced conclusions as to what can and should be done by the international community to achieve genuine progress in this critical area for humanitarian mine clearance.

The mandate of the expert group on the technologies in question therefore requires a mobilization of numerous players next December: the officials of mine action centres, active players in non-governmental organizations involved in such activities, regional organizations and international fund-raisers, researchers and analysts, public and private research and development institutions, and States directly or indirectly responsible for research efforts in the directions earlier referred to. Participation at the highest level of responsibility and expertise of these various elements of the international mine clearance community will be indispensable for the success of that work.

Mr. Aboul Gheit (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me at the outset to express our thanks to the Secretary-General for his progress report on assistance in mine action and the mobilization of resources for the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Action to help in mine clearance. The Fund has contributed clearly and positively to addressing this question.

The attention given to this subject by the General Assembly since 1993 and the increased attention to it on the part of the international community as a whole express awareness of the gravity of the mine problem, which must be dealt with comprehensively, while taking into account all the dimensions and aspects of the problem. In this regard, Egypt supports the important role played by the United Nations in the field of assistance in mine action, be it through the Voluntary Trust Fund or through the United Nations Mine Action Service. It is our hope that they both will contribute

effectively and positively to solving the severe repercussions of the question of mines in all its aspects.

In paragraph 150, the Secretary-General's report states:

> "Though the level of interest in the global landmine crisis remains high, the focus of concern for humanitarian and development assistance by donor Governments and donor organizations is constantly being pulled in many directions. Each new humanitarian crisis inevitably draws the world's attention and resources away from other, equally worthwhile causes."

As a mine-affected country, Egypt fully concurs with what the Secretary-General has stated in that paragraph. Once again, we reaffirm the need to attach the same level of importance to all mine problems, whether they are old or recent. They must all be dealt with in a fair and balanced manner.

On another level, we have detected in the Secretary-General's report a clear emphasis on the humanitarian dimension of the mine problem alone, without giving the other interrelated dimensions of the problem as a whole the same emphasis. While we appreciate the importance of the humanitarian dimension of the mine problem, we also deem it necessary that all the other aspects of the problem — whether related to development, economics, demographics or security — must be dealt with, in order to arrive at a comprehensive solution to the mine problem and not an inconclusive, palliative one.

In this regard, I cannot fail to recall the conclusion of the Secretary-General's 1997 report, which stated that it was high time to define the scope and magnitude of the mine problem once and for all and that a more accurate global assessment was necessary. According to that report, such assessment would take into account a number of elements, including political, humanitarian, developmental, economic and security-related ones.

Allow me now to deal with the problem of landmines in my country, Egypt. The problem is the presence of nearly 23 million landmines laid in an area of more than 288,000 hectares of Egyptian territory. This constitutes a huge obstacle to the development of these regions. Most of these mines were laid by the warring parties during the Battle of El-Alamein in October and November 1942.

The Egyptian authorities are currently implementing, within their financial capabilities, an ambitious plan to clear Egyptian territory of the landmines laid by the warring parties during the Second World War. Action under this plan has been carried out since July 1991.

In this regard, I would like to reiterate the following points: first, the implementation of this plan places huge technical and financial burdens that the Egyptian Government should not bear alone. Secondly, there is an urgent and immediate need for the countries that laid mines in Egyptian territory to provide accurate maps and information on their location, in addition to assistance in their clearance. Thirdly, the cost of clearing these mines has risen sharply, since a large number of them are currently buried under thick layers of sand. In view of the sand dune shifts in that area over the years, some of those mines are a few metres below the surface.

Fourthly, the presence of such a huge number of mines over a very large area clearly thwarts the efforts of the Egyptian Government to use and exploit natural resources in that land. It is also an obstacle to the development efforts carried out by the Egyptian Government in both the Western desert and Sinai. Fifthly, these mines, most of which are a mixture of anti-personnel and anti-tank landmines, have caused and continue to cause humanitarian losses and obstacles that the human conscience cannot afford to overlook.

Absent from the Secretary-General's report is a reference to the responsibility of those States that laid mines in the territory of other States in the past. Also absent from the report is the call to those States to provide assistance to clear the mines that they laid — those mines, which as I said before, have caused innumerable human tragedies and developmental obstacles.

The delegation of Egypt regrets once again that the report did not contain the question of the responsibility of the countries that have laid the mines as one of the aspects of the problem as a whole. In this regard, I would like to reaffirm that mine clearance is not the responsibility of the affected countries alone; it is also the responsibility of the States that laid the mines in the territories of others. In addition, mine clearance is the responsibility of the international community as a whole. In this context, we welcome the view expressed in the statement made by Finland on behalf of the European Union regarding the responsibility of the parties that have laid mines in the territories of other States.

The concept of demining has been further developed since the signing of the Ottawa Convention. This question is being treated from a new perspective that takes into account a number of considerations, in addition to those pertaining to demining per se, including rehabilitation and advocacy. This is reflected in the draft resolution under this agenda item, the title of which was changed from "Assistance in mine clearance", its title at the fifty-third session of the General Assembly, to "Assistance in mine action". Although we do not object to this new tendency, we continue to believe that attention must be focused primarily on demining operations intended to prevent further suffering and human losses.

In this connection, I must refer to the fact that despite the prompt international response by many States to sign and ratify the Ottawa Convention — whose humanitarian objectives have gained my Government's sympathy — a number of other States, including Egypt, have numerous reservations about the Convention. Those reservations have been raised at several international forums. We therefore believe that it is necessary to conduct a more comprehensive study of the problem of mines at the international forum devoted to this issue, namely the Conference on Disarmament.

Finally, I would like to express our gratitude to the Department of Peacekeeping Operations Mine Action Service for its praiseworthy efforts in this regard. I would again like to reaffirm Egypt's full readiness to cooperate with the United Nations Mine Action Service on this important issue.

Mr. Bakhit (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): The clearance of anti-personnel landmines is one of the fundamental components of post-conflict peace-building, given the enormous number of landmines in the world, the huge costs of mine clearance and the fact that the impact of anti-personnel landmines goes beyond directly endangering persons and property and covers a wide spectrum of socio-economic aspects in mine-affected countries. Given the humanitarian danger anti-personnel landmines represent to civilians, and as one of the African countries affected, the Sudan supports international efforts aimed at eliminating landmines.

The Sudan was one of the first signatories to the Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction. We have taken part in many regional and international conferences seeking the elimination of these devastating weapons. In this regard, the Sudan welcomes the entry into force of the Convention on 11 March 1999 and the outcome of the First Meeting of the States Parties to the Convention, which was held at Maputo in May of this year.

The General Assembly welcomed Sudan's signature of the Convention in its resolution 53/10 of 17 December 1998 regarding Operation Lifeline Sudan and appealed to the United Nations and the international community to extend the necessary mine clearance assistance to the Sudan.

The Sudan has organized several seminars and conferences within the framework of local mine awareness efforts aimed at receiving domestic and foreign support for mine clearance efforts. Moreover, a national committee on mine clearance was established in 1997, consisting of representatives of the Government, institutions and non-governmental organizations. It has undertaken several mine action activities, identified the needs of the Sudan in the field of mine clearance and developed comprehensive programmes on mine awareness. It has also been urging the international community to extend assistance to support national efforts in mine clearance and to develop national capabilities in both mine clearance and victim rehabilitation.

I would also like to mention the activities undertaken by the Institute for Disaster and Refugee Studies in Khartoum and by the artificial limbs centre, which operates under the Ministry of Social Planning in the Sudan.

The Sudan continues to look forward to receiving international support in the field of technical assistance and advanced technology for mine clearance in the framework of domestic efforts to achieve stability and security for the civilian population.

The United Nations report on anti-personnel landmines issued in April of this year indicated that the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has responded to a request by the Sudan for assistance in mine clearance. The Office conducted surveys in the Sudan in 1997 and prepared a report on the question of landmines in the Sudan that reflects the country's financial needs for clearing those mines. However, it is with deep regret that the report indicated a lack of international funding necessary to implement national mine clearance programmes in the Sudan.

While we praise the efforts deployed by the Mine Action Service as the focal point to coordinate mine action within the United Nations, which efforts are reflected in the report of the Secretary-General in document A/54/445 — which also gave details of the activities of agencies such as the United Nations Children's Fund and the International Committee of the Red Cross in the Sudan — my country nevertheless hopes that these bodies will continue their efforts to mobilize the necessary funding to assist with mine awareness and victim assistance programmes in the Sudan.

As a signatory to the Ottawa Convention, we hope that all States parties to the Convention will be treated equally with regard to mine clearance assistance and that the focus will not be only on certain geographical regions. We call for international assistance to secure the *materiel*, equipment, technology and financial resources necessary for mine clearance in the mine affected countries.

Mr. Santos (Mozambique): I would like to congratulate the President for the excellent manner in which he is conducting the affairs of the General Assembly.

My delegation commends the inclusion on the agenda of the General Assembly of item 35, entitled "Assistance in mine action", to which my Government attaches great importance.

My delegation has studied with great interest the report of the Secretary-General (A/54/445) and considers the document well balanced and informative.

Landmines are responsible for a large number of casualties and for the suffering of innocent civilians, especially in countries affected by internal conflicts. The widespread and indiscriminate use of landmines has become a characteristic feature mostly of countries in conflict. Landmines represent serious obstacles to political stability and to economic and social development. They impede the reintegration and return of hundreds of thousands of refugees and displaced persons to their fertile land, and they cause economic, environmental and psychological degradation.

As a result of the long years of conflict in Mozambique, about 2 million landmines have been planted. Most of them do not have a clear mapping system. Even in those areas with mapped minefields, natural disasters such as heavy rain and flooding have moved a large number of landmines from their original positions, thus hampering the demining efforts being carried out by my Government with the assistance of the international community. Regardless of the difficulties we are facing in the implementation of various programmes and field activities, my Government remains fully committed to devoting adequate attention to the question of landmines.

In the struggle against landmines, strengthening and enhancing the national capacity of affected countries is of paramount importance. It was within this context that my Government has transformed the National Demining Commission into the National Demining Institute. This move is meant to give the new institution the necessary autonomy, flexibility and effectiveness and to ensure better interaction with our cooperating partners in mine action programmes.

My Government's commitment to put an end to the scourge of landmines is unquestionable and led us to host in Maputo the First Meeting of the States Parties to the Convention on anti-personnel mines. That Meeting adopted the Maputo Declaration, which contains political guidelines and recommendations for the eradication of landmines worldwide. We believe that the international community must sustain the momentum built in Maputo through its full participation in the inter-sessional work taking place in Geneva.

My delegation would like to stress that no government, international agency or non-governmental organization on its own has the capacity to deal with the problem of landmines. Furthermore, there are no quick fixes or single solutions to the humanitarian problems caused by landmines. To achieve tangible results in the struggle against these insidious weapons, we must work together.

The ultimate goal of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction is the total eradication of landmines from our planet. To achieve this objective, we need a comprehensive set of actions that can be tailored to the needs and special conditions of each mine-affected country. In our view, this set of actions includes: mine awareness and the education of children, women, the elderly and communities on the dangers of landmines; disciplined surveys to determine the extent of the problem in the countries seriously affected; demining of priority areas that have important economic and social value, including the provision of equipment, financial support and training to host country deminers, thus enhancing

national demining capacity; and medical, social and psychological assistance for the rehabilitation and reintegration of landmine victims.

The true measure of success in this struggle is not only the total number of landmines removed from the ground, but also the improvement of socio-economic conditions in affected countries. In Mozambique, for instance, we have cleared 6,000 kilometres of roads, and thousands of hectares of farmlands have been put back into cultivation, allowing displaced persons and refugees to return to their homes and resume their normal life.

To achieve the goals envisaged in the Convention on anti-personnel mines, international cooperation and assistance is essential. The international community should strengthen and enhance mine action centres in affected countries in order to empower peoples to address their own problems. The international community should help the countries in need to create and maintain a database of landmines, demining programmes and victim assistance efforts around the world.

These steps, combined with the global humanitarian dimension of mine action, constitute a pragmatic approach towards eliminating the threat of landmines around the world by the year 2010, as envisaged in the Convention. This is a concrete challenge that enjoys the strongest support from the 136 States signatories and 89 ratifiers of the Convention.

Before I conclude, let me emphasize that, as we deal with the landmine issue and its destructive power, we have to reflect thoroughly on how best to eliminate the scourge of anti-personnel mines. We must strengthen the alliance among States and civil society, thus pooling our talents in this great battle against landmines.

Finally, it is our sincere hope that the growing awareness and action on the issue of anti-personnel mines at various levels, including in the Security Council, will result in concrete actions that will relieve the suffering of innocent children, women and elderly persons worldwide. The faster we act, the more lives we save and the more prosperity we create for present and future generations.

Mr. Yamazaki (Japan): At the outset, I should like to take this opportunity to express the deep appreciation of my delegation to the Secretary-General and other members of the Secretariat of the United Nations, and in particular the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Mine Action Service, as well as to all the countries and non-governmental organizations that have taken initiatives and made efforts to achieve progress in the area of mine action.

Anti-personnel landmines are one of the most urgent problems that the international community faces today. Even now, at the end of the century, more than 110 million landmines remain in the ground in about 70 countries, where they pose a continuing danger to innocent children playing on the ground and diligent farmers working in the field, as well as to peacekeepers and humanitarian personnel.

In the light of the inhumane nature of anti-personnel landmines, which cause human suffering in the most random and brutal manner, the resulting problems must be addressed as a threat to human life, survival and dignity. This is the concept of human security about which Prime Minister Obuchi of Japan is profoundly concerned. I feel strongly that, from the standpoint of ensuring human security, the international community must work together and with perseverance to tackle the issue of landmines.

Not only do these devices claim human lives, but they remain a serious obstacle to reconstruction and development during the post-conflict nation-building process, because the actual or suspected existence of anti-personnel landmines means that access is denied to much-needed resources and services. Even if we assume that no new landmines will be laid, it has been estimated that it would take many decades to totally eliminate existing mines at the present pace of clearing 100,000 a year. As for the cost of demining, while a landmine can be obtained for about $3, it costs the international community between $300 and $1,000 to remove it. This is an intolerable situation.

In the last few years, the international community has made significant progress in combating the evil of landmines by establishing an international legal framework. I am referring, of course, to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, which was concluded in September 1997 and which entered into force last March, less than one and a half years later. The Convention can already boast more than 130 signatories and more than 85 ratifiers, Japan being one of them. We held the First Meeting of the States Parties to the Convention last May in Maputo, where we adopted a Declaration reaffirming our unwavering commitment to the total eradication of anti-

personnel landmines. I would like to urge non-signatory countries to become parties to the Convention as soon as possible.

Japan has extended mine-related assistance for more than 10 years. The Tokyo Conference on Anti-personnel Landmines in March 1997 was the first attempt to deal comprehensively with demining activities and victim assistance. Participants identified three important fields in which international efforts should be strengthened: first, landmine clearance by the United Nations and other organizations; secondly, development of new technology for mine detection and removal; and thirdly, assistance to landmine victims. Each of these three fields embodies a core concept that is the basis for mine action.

At the Ottawa Signing Conference in 1997, then Foreign Minister Obuchi proposed that we establish a goal of "zero victims", and this idea was adopted in the Maputo Declaration by the States parties to the Ottawa Convention. The assistance provided by Japan to realize this objective is based on three principles.

The first principle is ownership. This is the principle that mine-affected countries should play a primary role in mine action activities. For this purpose, it is important for donors to assist mine-affected countries in setting up domestic structures for mine action, with an emphasis on capacity-building. For its part, for example, Japan has supported the establishment of mine action centres in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Cambodia. In these countries, mine action centres have played an important role as a domestic focal point in the establishment and development of national mine clearance, mine awareness and victim assistance capacities. Japan truly hopes that mine action centres recently established with our financial assistance in Chad and Thailand will also prove successful.

The second principle is partnership. It is essential for donor countries, international organizations and non-governmental organizations involved in mine action to coordinate their activities. Accordingly, coordination through the United Nations system is important, and Japan wishes to emphasize the important role that the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) plays as the focal point for coordination and the sharing of information on mine action by the related United Nations agencies, regional organizations, national Governments and non-governmental organizations all over the world.

The third principle is human security, a theme I touched on earlier, which refers to all efforts to ensure human survival, well-being and dignity. It is clear that the problem of landmines must be addressed as a threat to human security.

The financial assistance Japan provides through international organizations, non-governmental organizations and bilateral channels has amounted to more than $40 million to date. It includes disbursements to the Afghanistan project and the demining project in Peru managed by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) respectively, the fund for the Cambodian Mine Action Centre, managed by UNDP, the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Action managed by UNMAS, and other institutions, such as the Organization of American States and the International Committee of the Red Cross. Through the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund, Japan has assisted mine action in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Angola, Laos, Yemen, Cambodia, Nicaragua, Thailand, Azerbaijan, Chad and Guatemala in close consultation with UNMAS. Japan is now seeking possibilities of assisting in mine action in Ecuador. At the Ottawa Signing Conference, then Foreign Minister Obuchi announced that Japan would contribute 10 billion yen, or about $80 million in this area over a five-year period beginning in 1998, in order to achieve the goal of "zero victims".

In summary, the position of Japan on the issue of assistance in mine action is based on the three principles. They are ownership, or promoting the efforts of mine-affected countries themselves; partnership, or promoting coordination of the activities of agencies of the United Nations, regional organizations, national Governments and non-governmental organizations; and human security, or promoting the survival, well-being and dignity of all people. Because it is for the well-being of all people that we have dedicated our efforts in this field, it is natural that we should have set for ourselves the goal of "zero victims".

In conclusion, I wish to reaffirm that Japan will do its utmost to provide the financial, technological and humanitarian resources necessary to ensure that international efforts are successful in achieving the goal of "zero victims".

Mr. Wang Lei (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China understands the humanitarian concerns of the international community concerning the indiscriminate killing and maiming of innocent civilians by landmines, and supports

the humanitarian efforts in this regard. The Chinese Government attaches great importance to the question of the indiscriminate killing and maiming of civilians by landmines, and supports the appropriate and reasonable regulation of the use of landmines.

Since 1992, the Chinese Government has conducted two large-scale demining activities in the border areas of Yunnan and Guangxi provinces. According to incomplete statistics, over 2.2 million landmines and unexploded ordnance have been cleared, more than 7 million tons of unexploded ordnance have been destroyed, an area of 240 square kilometres has been cleared of landmines and over 170 roads and ports in border areas have been opened. More than 60,000 acres of arable land, grassland, forests and mountains have been reclaimed.

The Chinese Government actively supports and participates in international mine action activities and has capabilities to provide assistance to mine-affected countries. This year and next, there will be 52 trainees from mine-affected countries, and a number of personnel from United Nations agencies will come to China to attend the training workshops conducted by China in cooperation with United Nations agencies. The first workshop is now under way.

China, even as a developing country, has the capacity to join in the efforts of the international community to continue to carry out international assistance in mine action and to open up more peaceful and safe land for mine affected countries.

Mr. Granovsky (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The Russian Federation traditionally attaches great importance to the range of problems surrounding mine clearance, to the mobilization of efforts of the international community to overcome the negative consequences of the danger of mines — which impede the social and economic restoration of States affected by conflicts — and to a solution to urgent humanitarian problems.

We can clearly see the humanitarian aspect of the serious issue of mines, and we consider international cooperation in the area of mine clearance an important part of the solution to the complex task of post-conflict resolution. We understand all too well the sufferings of people in all corners of the globe who have fallen victim to mines, because we, in fact, have first-hand knowledge of this problem. Yearly in the territory of Russia, more than 100,000 unexploded ordnance are discovered and destroyed, and the direct costs for these operations exceed 25 million dollars a year.

We agree to a ban on the production, use, stockpiling and transfer of anti-personnel mines as the ultimate objective of agreed international efforts. The Russian Federation favours gradual progress toward this goal through a number of agreed-upon interim stages, including the establishment of viable alternatives to this type of defensive weapon. At this stage we consider as a particularly important objective the providing for the broadest possible participation of members of the international community in the amended Protocol II, the "Mines" Protocol, to the Convention on Inhumane Weapons of 1980, and unswerving compliance with the norms and standards which it has introduced. The basis of this document is a carefully adjusted balance of the interests of States which takes into account their real possibilities, security and self-defense interests. We hope that in the very near future, we will be able to formalize legally our participation in the Protocol.

We are convinced of the urgency of the problem of stepping up efforts of the international community to make fuller use of the potential of States and of the United Nations in mine clearance in areas of regional conflicts. In light of the above, we consider as relevant the problem of improving the convergence of the activities of various United Nations organs and making full use of their knowledge and resources. On the whole, in our view, there are good reasons for having the United Nations play a leading role in the coordination of technical assistance and in organizing national potential for mine clearance. We are also hoping for real additions in the very near future to the Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Clearance established by the Secretary-General.

For Russia, questions of interaction with the United Nations, exchanges of experience and receiving technical, financial and material assistance are of very real and practical importance. In particular, we are referring to the fact that during the implementation of peacekeeping operations on the territory of the Commonwealth of Independent States, complex and costly issues are being resolved with regard to mine clearance localities and objectives.

Russia is ready, on an ever larger scale, to take an active part in rendering assistance in mine clearance on a bilateral or multilateral basis to countries in need. We have acquired impressive scientific, technical and

industrial potential and expertise in the area of mine clearance which could be put to use in future international programmes in this sphere.

Mr. Castellón Duarte (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): I have the honour to take the floor on behalf of the countries of Central America and the Dominican Republic.

In the first place, we would like to thank the Secretary-General for his report on assistance in mine action, document A/54/445, which contains important information on the activities of mine clearance which are under way in various parts of the world.

Mine clearance operations in Central America are a humanitarian task of the greatest importance for the region, since thousands of anti-personnel mines and other explosive devices were planted there indiscriminately over the past decade. These weapons, most of them of produced industrially, are true death-traps for the rural population. Anti-personnel mines have caused loss of human life, of livestock and of domestic animals and have been a constant threat to the civil population. They have blocked the use of vast fertile lands for agriculture, consequently impeding development in general and limiting the increase in work opportunities.

Because of the fact that in many cases mines were planted without any plan and that hurricane Mitch and the resulting floods in November 1998 sometimes managed to redistribute them to new sites and farm fields, the tasks of mine clearance have become more urgent than ever, making the process slower, more dangerous and more costly.

Producing these mines was incredibly cheap, approximately one dollar per mine, which allowed these weapons of war to be easily acquired by the parties in conflicts who planted them, including indiscriminately in border zones of neighbouring countries which had no part in the conflicts. This is the case, for example, of mined territories in Honduras and Costa Rica. In contrast to the cost of production, the cost of removing the mines and detonating them is more than a thousand dollars per mine, without taking into account the human, social and ecological costs resulting from each mine.

In view of the urgency and importance of mine clearance for the peoples of Central America, and upon the request of the affected countries — Costa Rica, Honduras and Nicaragua — in 1991 the Organization of American States (OAS) provided support to the mine-clearance activities being conducted by these countries. The OAS — with the Centre for the Promotion of Democracy providing coordination and supervision, and the Inter-American Defense Board providing technical assistance — made possible the development of a programme to assist Central American demining efforts.

This programme involves the coordinated participation of several components: the donor countries, which are the source of funds; contributing countries members of the OAS which provide specialized demining technology; and the beneficiary countries — in the case of Central America, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua — which, with the help of the other countries, provide the sapper team: young people who are dedicated, disciplined and courageous and who risk their lives in carrying out their very sensitive and dangerous work. Recently, trained dogs have begun to be used, especially to sniff out and detect explosives in a given area. This programme also includes the placing of signs and reducing risks.

It is appropriate to thank those countries that contribute to this Central American demining programme. Some of them, such as Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, El Salvador, the United States, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela, are members of the OAS; others, such as Germany, Spain, the Russian Federation, France, the United Kingdom, Japan, the Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland, are permanent observers of the OAS. Special assistance has also been provided by Denmark and Norway.

El Salvador is another country that has suffered from the use of anti-personnel mines. Its Government began a mine-clearance programme under the supervision of the United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador, utilizing a sapper team jointly composed of personnel from the El Salvador armed forces and ex-combatants of the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional. They have undertaken a variety of mine-clearance programmes. We applaud the cooperation of former enemies that these operations involve.

Anti-personnel mines cause unnecessary harm, and we believe it is unnecessary to prove the tremendous burden for the entire medical systems of each of our countries of providing medical and social assistance to the victims of mines, from the evacuation of the wounded right through to his rehabilitation and reintegration into society. Thus we believe it is very important to point out

the joint programme of Mexico, Canada and the Pan American Health Organization for caring for victims of anti-personnel mines in El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua. This programme has been structured to deal with both the physical and psychological rehabilitation of the survivors of mine explosions.

The United Nations and its agencies have also made a significant contribution to demining operations in Central America. The United Nations Children's Fund has been conducting educational programmes on the dangers of mines in various regions where this scourge remains. In response to a request for assistance from the President of Nicaragua, a project of the United Nations Mine Action Service has made it possible to demine a 527,000-square-metre area around four bridges that were destroyed by floods caused by hurricane Mitch along the northern section of the main road between Managua and Honduras.

The will of our Governments to eliminate these deadly devices has been reiterated in various forms, one of which was the ratification by our countries of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction — the Ottawa Convention. Another manifestation of this will was the joint declaration of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs at the meeting on the progress of Central American demining activities, which was held on 13 April 1999. This declaration reaffirms the commitment of our Governments to the tasks of demining and destroying explosive devices, as well as the firm will to complete as soon as possible national mine-destruction programmes.

In conclusion, we appeal to the international donor community to continue to cooperate with demining programmes in Central America in order to rid the region of this scourge and let it become a zone free from anti-personnel mines.

Mr. Khan (Pakistan): My delegation wishes to thank the Secretary-General for his report on assistance in mine action, contained in document A/54/445.

Pakistan remains deeply concerned about the serious problem caused by the indiscriminate use of landmines, a problem that is deeply affecting the lives of millions of ordinary people in more than 60 developing countries, including Afghanistan, Angola, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, Iraq, Mozambique and Somalia. The problem continues to manifest itself in various forms. It impedes the effective execution of peacekeeping operations, rehabilitation of refugees and displaced persons, and post-conflict rebuilding and reconstruction.

Pakistan appreciates the growing international interest in dealing with this problem in its totality. Over the past few years concerted efforts have been made to sensitize world public opinion about the seriousness and magnitude of the problem caused by the indiscriminate use of anti-personnel landmines. In this regard, my delegation notes with appreciation the positive contribution made by the United Nations. Efforts to achieve an integrated and coherent approach encompassing the entire United Nations system are likely to yield positive results.

We continue to follow with great interest the broad range of activities undertaken by the United Nations on landmines-related issues since the designation of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations as the overall focal point and the United Nations Mine Action Service as the operational focal point on these issues. We welcome and remain supportive of various steps that have been taken to further strengthen the role and capabilities of the United Nations in this vitally important area.

We have noted with interest the change in terminology from "mine clearance" to "mine action", with a view to adopting a much broader and holistic approach to dealing with the landmines issue. While welcoming this broader focus it is essential not to lose sight of the fact that actual demining and mine clearance on the ground remains at the heart of efforts to deal with this problem. Although mine-awareness and advocacy campaigns are important facets of an overall strategy, these activities should in no way divert resources or attention from demining and mine clearance.

Similarly, global conferences and international instruments on landmines should focus greater attention on the need for more resources for actual demining operations in the countries afflicted by this problem. It is a matter of concern that resources for these activities have not shown the desired increase, even though the international community today is more sensitized than ever before to the seriousness and gravity of the landmines crisis. It is hoped that the international community, especially the developed countries, will contribute more resources to overcome this challenge. Pakistan for its part has actively contributed to demining operations all over the world. Our participation in demining operations in Kuwait, Cambodia, Angola, Eastern Slovenia and Western Sahara reflects our

commitment to dealing with the crisis caused by the indiscriminate use of landmines.

In our view, the issue of mine action needs to be differentiated from the demands for controlling or banning the use of landmines. The question of control of the use of landmines raises issues that lie in the realm of disarmament. These issues should be dealt with in the Conference on Disarmament. In this context, Pakistan favours the initiation of negotiations at the Conference on Disarmament on an international legal instrument banning the transfer/export of anti-personnel landmines.

Pakistan imposed a moratorium on the export of landmines in March 1997. This moratorium has been reinforced by the issuance of an appropriate notification by the Government of Pakistan completely banning the export of anti-personnel mines. We have also ratified the amended Protocol II of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons. We look forward to participating constructively in the First Annual Conference of High Contracting Parties to Amended Protocol II, to be held in Geneva this year. Pakistan has submitted information required under article 11 (2) and article 13 (4) of the amended Protocol II to the United Nations, which will be available to the participants of the Conference of High Contracting Parties. Steps now need to be taken to ensure universal adherence to the amended Protocol II of the Convention. We remain ready to consider further measures and initiatives in relevant multilateral forums to address the problems arising out of the indiscriminate use of landmines.

Mr. Tudela (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the end of the twentieth century, after two World Wars and innumerable local conflicts, we find that anti-personnel landmines continue to be used in different areas of the planet. Two thirds of the world's countries are contaminated by these weapons, which have indiscriminate and deadly consequences that, by rendering inaccessible the areas where they are sown, will be felt for many years.

The permanence of anti-personnel landmines exacerbates tensions, undermines trust and obstructs diplomatic efforts to achieve a peaceful solution to conflicts. That is why the goal of the complete elimination of anti-personnel landmines remains a priority for Peru and for all those States that seek to eliminate this threat.

Peru has participated since the beginning in the process that led to the adoption of the Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, and was one of the first countries to ratify it. We therefore hail its entry into force in March this year.

The First Meeting of the States Parties in May in Maputo, Mozambique, and the Maputo Declaration that emerged from the Meeting, are important political expressions that strengthen the universalization of the Convention. We therefore believe it necessary for those States that are not yet parties to the Convention to sign it and for the signatory countries to ratify it as soon as possible. The Meeting served to establish certain principles for the application of the Convention and five standing committees of experts for the execution of its work programme. Peru is a member of the standing committee of experts on mine clearance, which held its first session last September.

We believe that it is highly important to continue to work to achieve the implementation of the goals and provisions of the Ottawa Convention. Our country therefore believes it necessary to review the demining standards and the criteria used to decide the assignment of international cooperation; to reassert the existence of links between mine removal and the consolidation of peace and mutual trust between neighbouring countries; the possible participation of armed forces in demining operations; and the need for the primacy of national decisions in the planning and management of mine-action programmes.

In the work of demining, we should also bear in mind the fact that the Ottawa Convention complements other international mechanisms on this subject; the ecological value of the areas of acknowledged biodiversity; the preservation of traditional anthropological patterns; the priority to be given to cooperation aimed at training national authorities in charge of planning and managing programmes of anti-landmine measures within affected countries; the acknowledgment of the contribution that the regional coordination mechanisms for demining, such as the Organization of American States, can offer; and the advisability of exchanging experiences with other affected countries, non-governmental organizations and the United Nations Development Programme.

Peru also believes that the affected countries must decide whether their armed forces are capable of demining and that international cooperation must assign priority to the training in all areas that is required by medium-and long-term anti-mine measures. We share the

position in favour of linking demining plans with specific development projects.

Consistent with its position against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and those with injurious and indiscriminate effect, in 1997 Peru ratified the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects and its Protocols, including Amended Protocol II on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Mines, Booby-traps and Other Devices.

We welcome the First Annual Conference of the High Contracting Parties to Amended Protocol II, to be held from 15 to 17 December this year in Geneva. We also wish to state that Peru has complied with its obligation, in its capacity as a country that has ratified and deposited the Convention, to submit to the Secretary-General its first annual report, in accordance with article 13 (4) of the amended Protocol II.

Within the regional framework, Peru, together with other States, has promoted and supported the decision to make the western hemisphere a zone free of anti-personnel landmines and the creation of a register of anti-personnel landmines. It has also created a specific mechanism for international cooperation, consisting of a regional list of demining experts, in order to supplement the efforts of the States to translate the provisions of the Ottawa Convention into reality within their respective territories. It has also proposed a project to contribute to the universalization of the Ottawa Convention in the Americas by creating a group of personalities to publicize the Convention and its scope throughout civil society.

Universalization and cooperation are two essential aspects we must consider if we wish to achieve genuine implementation of the Ottawa Convention. Concerted international efforts should not be limited to the prohibition of anti-personnel landmines. They should also include financial and technical assistance to the countries affected by the mines, specifically for their removal and for humanitarian assistance to mine victims and survivors.

The Peruvian delegation wishes to express its gratitude for the extensive and substantive report submitted by the Secretary-General on this subject. We are pleased to see that the policy laid down by the United Nations on the coordination of efforts, activities and resources is now more effective. We make an appeal that the United Nations Mine Action Service activities be supplied with sufficient and foreseeable financial resources that will allow it to develop its coordination tasks properly.

We also believe that it is important to develop national awareness and extensive coordination at the national level to build sustainable national capacity. Access to new technologies for the removal of anti-personnel mines is also fundamental.

At the national level Peru has established a juridical and institutional framework that supplements international activities on mines. An inter-sectorial coordination group has been set up to evaluate and recommend the political, legal and administrative measures that must be adopted in order to implement the Ottawa Convention in Peru. Some of the measures recommended by that group have already been approved, including in particular the steps taken so that the armed forces and police forces reconvert the facilities used to manufacture mine prototypes and withdraw, inventory and destroy mines in order to protect the basic infrastructure, to train national personnel in tasks related to demarcation of mined areas, to remove, deactivate and destroy mines and to facilitate the rehabilitation of the victims.

Peru began mine removal from its territory in December 1996, under a two-stage programme. The first stage was mine removal associated with the demarcation of the Peruvian-Ecuadorian border, which, under mutual agreement with Ecuador, was performed with national resources and the supplementary technical and financial support of four friendly countries: Canada, Spain, the United States and Japan, to whom we reaffirm our gratitude for their swift and favourable acceptance of our requests for assistance. I have the pleasure of reporting that that stage was concluded last May.

The second stage consists of medium- and long-term national mine removal, a task which is undergoing evaluation and logistics planning. Due to the magnitude of the problem and the climatic and geographic characteristics of mined zones, we believe that this stage can be executed within the time-frame stipulated by the Ottawa Convention only if we can gain access to technical and financial cooperation and to logistical support given by other States parties to the Ottawa Convention, non-governmental organizations and international organizations that are committed to the cause of achieving a world free of anti-personnel mines.

It is obvious that such measures are extremely expensive, particularly for a developing country such as

Peru. In this context, we wish to emphasize that a fund specifically for support of mine removal in Peru has been opened within the framework of the Organization of American States in order to continue receiving international cooperation for projects for prevention, assistance to victims and gradual demining throughout our national territory.

As in former years, Peru has co-sponsored the draft resolution which is being submitted on this subject, which we hope the General Assembly will again adopt by consensus.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate for this meeting. We shall hear the remaining speakers tomorrow morning at 10 a.m. as the first item.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.